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MAY IS NATIONAL MOVING MONTH FMCSA Administrator Urges Consumer Education

Joins with consumer groups, moving industry and state agency to inform Texans

May is National Moving Month, the kick off to the busiest time of year for people changing residences and falling victim to unlicensed movers. National and state leaders gathered in the capitol city on Tuesday to educate Texans on how to avoid getting scammed by unlicensed movers and to announce their efforts at making a difference.

"Moving is about more than just sheets and towels, or pots and pans," said Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Administrator Anne S. Ferro during the news conference at the Austin office of Better Business Bureau (BBB) serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and Permian Basin. "We move our memories and the items that make a new city or house feel like home.

"While moving company complaints in Texas have dropped by 39 percent since 2011, the Lone Star state still has the sixth most complaints in the country," she said. "If you're planning a move, take the time to learn your rights and the red flags of moving fraud by visiting www.ProtectYourMove.gov."

More than 30 million Americans move every year. There are more than 5,000 moving companies nationwide and 793 licensed movers in Texas.

Despite Texas' growth of 1,000 new people in the state each day, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV), Southwest Movers Association (SMA) and BBB are having a safety impact on Texans. "At a time of record growth for Texas, the efforts by these groups have dropped Texas from the third worse state in the country for moving scams to sixth in one year," Ferro said.

She cited the TxDMV's enforcement investigators for their efforts resolving complaints and taking on an expanded role in assisting with interstate complaints as putting unlicensed movers on notice that any attempts to operate in Texas will not be tolerated by the state. "FMCSA and TxDMV are determined to make Texas one of safest states for consumers to hire a moving company," she added.

But this is not an issue that can be solved by government alone, which is why the efforts of SMA and its national affiliate, the American Moving & Storage Association (AMSA), along with BBB, are so important to protecting and educating consumers, Ferro said.

So far this year, BBB has received more than 2,500 consumer complaints nationwide against the moving industry. Many of those complaints allege lost or damaged property, rude or hostile employees and pricing issues. While many movers are legitimate, others may not be. Moving scams are preventable. Consumers just need to know the right thing to do.

"Unlicensed movers are rogue operators who are not legitimate moving companies. It takes just a click of the mouse to find them out," said Whitney Brewster, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles executive director. "Go to Truck Stop on www.TxDMV.gov, put in a company name, and we'll tell you whether it's licensed in Texas. Don't make a move without us."

If you are planning to move from or to another state, you can verify a moving company's credentials at the Federal Motor Safety Administration website, www.ProtectYourMove.gov.

It is important to know where to safely shop for a mover. That process should begin with looking up moving companies at BBB's website, bbb.org, SMA for Texas companies, www.mytexasmover.com, and AMSA for interstate movers, www.promover.org.

"It takes a lifetime to build what you can sometimes move in a day," said Carrie A. Hurt, President/CEO for BBB serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin. "So, it's nice to have a mover you can trust."

"In our service area we have about 150 moving companies that are BBB Accredited Businesses. So you can easily find a moving company you trust by going straight to checkbbb.org," Hurt said.

BBB has a total of nearly 12,000 Accredited Businesses in their 79-county service area. All BBB Accredited Businesses abide by a strict set of eight standards for trust that range from making sure the business is advertising honestly, to safeguarding the privacy of their customers.

SMA and AMSA offer special certifications to moving companies who follow the highest ethical and business practices, giving them the designation of either Pinnacle Movers or ProMovers.

"A con artist with just a truck and a website can claim to be a legitimate mover with unfortunate results for consumers who don't check out a company in advance," noted AMSA president and CEO Linda Bauer Darr. "When it comes to such an important decision, you can save yourself a lot of problems by identifying a mover who puts customer service and integrity first."

"It's important to understand how all these groups work together to protect Texans," said SMA Executive Director John D. Esparza. "We work closely with the TxDMV. When we hear about an illegal moving operation we send consumers directly to the TxDMV to file a complaint."

The TxDMV encourages consumers to also file a complaint with BBB. "We regulate moving companies in Texas so it's important if you have a problem to file a complaint

with us," Brewster said. "But we also encourage you to go to the BBB. They put out ratings on moving companies while the TxDMV determines whether a mover should be licensed or if it's actually operating illegally in the state."

To learn the right steps to take before you move, consumers can visit any of the organizations' websites for tips on the proper way to hire a moving company.

"Research is key," Hurt said. "Make sure you get bids from at least three companies, get everything in writing, including fees, and make sure those movers have the proper insurance."

New federal and Texas laws are also aiding consumers. Under Ferro's leadership, Congress passed a law that includes stiff fines and penalties for illegal operators. SMA and TxDMV assisted with a new law that passed the legislature that increases financial penalties and jail time for repeat offenses committed by unlicensed movers.

"It's important to be equipped when fighting against illegal operators," Esparza said. "But what we all hope for is a day we don't need to use laws and investigations because consumers are so well educated that they never hire an unlicensed mover again.

"If the rogue operators' business dries up, they'll be the ones moving on," Esparza added.

Better Business Bureau serving Central, Coastal, Southwest Texas and the Permian Basin, Texas Department of Motor Vehicles and Southwest Movers Association offer these important moving tips:

Texas law requires movers to give you:

- A written proposal or estimate that shows either a guaranteed flat price (binding amount) or a "not to exceed" maximum amount for the move.
- A written and signed contract before the move begins.
- Standard liability of 60 cents per pound per item. (Note: It is unlikely standard liability will cover the cost of your item. Some movers offer the option to purchase an increased liability amount for goods or you can purchase insurance that will cover the cost of your possessions.)
- A brochure that outlines your Rights & Responsibilities under Texas law.
- Another copy of the contract upon completion of the move. This contract should include the total charge for the move; an itemized list of what the charges are for; and the method used to calculate the charges.

If you decide to alter the original contract, the moving company must write an amendment that outlines any additional charges and services. You and the moving company representative must sign and date the amended contract.

Always remember:

Never hire an unlicensed mover.

- Check the company's license status at <u>Truck Stop</u> on the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles website, <u>www.TxDMV.gov</u>. For interstate moves, go to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration website, <u>www.ProtectYourMove.gov</u>.
- If a moving deal seems too good to be true it probably is; be wary of cheap Internet offers.
- Use reputable online sources, such as Southwest Movers Association (SMA), <u>www.mytexasmover.com</u>, Better Business Bureau (BBB), <u>www.bbb.org</u>, and American Moving & Storage Association (AMSA), <u>www.movers.org</u>, when looking for a moving company.
- ProMovers (AMSA certification) and Pinnacle Movers (SMA Certification) are elite groups of movers held to high standards of service, conduct and ethics within the industry. Visit www.promover.org or www.mytexasmover.com
- Never accept a verbal quote or agreement. Get everything in writing, signed and dated.
- Read the contract BEFORE signing it.
- If a truck shows up without the company name and USDOT or TxDMV number printed on it, send it away. (These numbers verify it's a licensed moving company.)

If you have a problem:

- Call your local police if a mover attempts to hold your items hostage for additional payment not in your contract or threatens to drive off with your belongings.
- Always file a complaint with both the <u>Texas Department of Motor Vehicles</u> and Better Business Bureau.

For more moving tips:

Better Business Bureau, www.bbb.org or www.bbb.org or www.TxDMV.gov
Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, www.TxDMV.gov
Southwest Movers Association, www.mytexasmover.com
American Moving & Storage Association, www.moving.org
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, www.ProtectYourMove.gov

ABOUT TXDMV:

The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, which regulates the moving industry in Texas and investigates complaints arising out of household goods moves, does not endorse any particular licensed moving company. The TxDMV is a great resource for consumers, offering moving tips and the Truck Stop online application at www.TxDMV.gov where consumers can check whether a moving company is properly licensed.